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ABSTRACT

Programs for the teaching of foreign language to groups both in and out of the schools are examined for reasons why they were not successful. Emphasis is placed on faulty planning and insufficient funding. A proposal is made that the National Institute of Education undertake an investigation of present centers of bilingual and bicultural education for Latin-American children and their parents. It is suggested that following such an investigation, a few exemplary programs should be developed with the intention of establishing a long-range policy in language instruction and, in addition, providing long-range funds for these programs. (JD)

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My School of Experience: Lessons Learned

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A paper prepared for the
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Abstract

"Make no little plans!" So urged President Millicent McIntosh as she welcomed our study group to Barnard College some forty years ago. "Plan well ahead but start slowly." This excellent "lesson" has often recurred to me as I watched elaborate but hasty programs rise and fall like skyrockets.

My experience with curriculum development relates primarily to foreign language learning and audio-visual instruction, two promising fields for innovation that in the main has failed because of poor planning or faulty supervision. Examples have been the dramatic initiative of USOE Commissioner Earl J. McGrath to urge the teaching of languages in the elementary grades, the Italian "Telescuola" program of total teaching of junior high school curriculum in remote villages lacking qualified teachers, and the crash programs of instruction in the Armed Forces during World War II; such attempts failed for political or administrative reasons unrelated to real potential for educational progress.

Unlike the crash programs, the NDEA of 1958 exerted a powerful if temporary influence on the high school curriculum. Language laboratories and certain doctrines were hastily adopted in many schools, with sometimes unfortunate results. The Institutes, though helpful, would have been benefited by more supervision than they received.

The curriculum can profit greatly from "seed money" if adequate time for growth is allowed and all parties plan for the future. In contrast, brief experiments usually produce dubious conclusions, while the curriculum is less improved than disrupted.

I propose a few small, exemplary programs in bilingual and bicultural education for Spanish-speaking minorities. I suggest that a committee of experts first survey the present programs and needs, then plan, establish and supervise such programs. If this committee should indeed start slowly and plan well ahead, the NIE might make a long-range commitment in principle if not in funding.

I. The Problems and Potential of Federal Support

A. THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND "FLES" (FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS)

Led by Commissioner Earl J. McGrath, the USOE in 1952 stimulated a great surge of enthusiasm and activity in FLES. The origin of this intervention was extraordinary.

Dr. McGrath had long been known as an opponent of foreign language study. Although I had never met him I began an argument by mail with him. His responses were politely but firmly negative. In due course I invited him to address the annual convention of a society of foreign language teachers, thinking that it would be good for us to meet and hear our influential opponent. At first he declined, but when he finally accepted, his speech was a dramatic turnabout; he had seen the light and reversed his position. He maintained, correctly, that childhood is the natural time for language learning: therefore he urged the earliest possible beginning.

So began the nationwide vogue of FLES. Two White House conferences on the subject were held in the following months and hopes were high. But in a change of administrations Dr. McGrath resigned his post, and his leadership was lost. After many vicissitudes FLES

declined. And we learned that the USOE giveth and the USOE taketh away.

B. THE ITALIAN MISISTRY OF EDUCATION AND "TELESCUOLA"

An even more dramatic reversal of policy occurred a few years ago in Italy. I had recently spent several days at the headquarters, in Rome, of the vast instructional TV program called Telescuola and subsequently I corresponded with one of the section heads.

In hundreds of remote villages for which no qualified teachers were available, Telescuola provided total teaching of the junior high school curriculum by means of broadcasts, textbooks and evaluation of written work forwarded to headquarters. Suddenly the entire program was totally terminated by the Ministry of Education, which commented only that the needed teachers had been found. But my correspondent assured me that the action was simply political. We know only that a huge investment in material and human resources was lost by arbitrary action.

C. THE NDEA OF 1958, THE CONGRESS, AND RESEARCH

Funds for research in foreign language learning were authorized in the Act but not appropriated until the spring of 1959; meanwhile hundreds of proposals for

research projects had accumulated in the USOE. Our too-small group of judges, devoting our Easter vacation to the task of rating them, began to work strenuously, for the approved projects had to be forwarded on by the end of the week: any uncommitted funds would be returned to the General Treasury. When it was soon evident that in one week we could judge only a small fraction of the proposals, our chairman ruled that only the costliest projects would be examined. That ruling was arbitrary and unfair but there was no sensible alternative. I do not know whether the authors of the unexamined projects were told the whole truth or only that their projects "had not been approved." Like justice, appropriations delayed are usually denied.

The "lesson": government support is subject to political hazards of delay and favoritism. The remedy (or ideal): fairly long-term commitments to policy, personnel and funds, as long as progress is achieved.

In the foreign language field the potential of federal support was first demonstrated significantly by the FAL program of the ASTP in World War II. The next major example was provided by the NDEA of 1958. Such programs were unprecedented and thrilling to the

FL profession. The potential was therefore great and its influence considerable, but unfortunately, because of special circumstances, seldom applicable to the school curriculum.

D. THE FL PROGRAM OF THE ASTP

Intended to prepare outstanding enlisted men for special service in occupied countries, this "crash program" involved thousands of trainees in scores of languages on dozens of college campuses. Instruction was by civilians; the Army provided ample funds, vague "guidelines" and no supervision.

In 1943 I suggested that the Modern Language Association (MLA) investigate this "Army Method" of instruction in FAL. But once funded and trained, a group of us soon found that there were almost as many "Army Methods" as programs, of which there were hundreds. With ample funds but no precedents or supervision, anything could happen: there were excellent programs and wretched ones. Yet at their best they offered the novelty of intensiveness (full time devoted to one subject), of emphasis on conversation rather than grammar, and of "area studies" (small c culture). The problem lay in adapting these programs to the very different curricula and needs of the schools.

E. THE NDEA INSTITUTES FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

As a rule, the universities are ill-suited for teacher training and retraining, for the research scholar is seldom interested in the schools or schoolteachers. This fact was demonstrated anew by the appearance of those foreign language Institutes of the NDEA which were conducted by the universities.

Although the Institutes were originally intended to retrain teachers in the new methods and materials and most of all to improve their oral-aural skills in the foreign language, these priorities were frequently changed. The "participants" (teacher-trainees) wanted graduate credit, and many host institutions agreed, foreseeing new recruits for their regular graduate programs. Reluctantly the USOE assented, with the result that the inteded activities, modest but practical, became subordinated to graduate courses in the foreign literature, civilization and linguistic theory, usually conducted in English. Returning to their jobs, many trainees had trouble with the new methods, materials and laboratories.

As an official "visitor" (inspector) I found good programs and poor ones. There were various mistakes which the USOE could have prevented or rectified by

providing a sufficient number of inspectors. Unfortunately we were few and overextended.

We "visitors" were nonetheless heartened and impressed by the gung-ho spirit and fine progress achieved in some Institutes. Sometimes the Institute was the only summer activity on the campus, thus acquiring a unique identity and sense of worth which encouraged the exclusive use of the foreign language at all times. I recall, for example, the nightly group pilgrimages to the nearby pub, where, over steins, professors and participants joined in singing the spirited old German songs. They were indeed living the language.

Such was the potential of the Institutes: a distinctive and memorable experience. Although too few Institutes achieved it, we know that it is possible and how to achieve it. We hope for another such opportunity.

II. State or Local Support, "Seed Money" and the Curriculum

A. STATE SUPPORT

A striking and recent example of state support (aided somewhat by federal funds) occurred in Georgia; the product was an elaborate series of TV programs in Spanish-American culture and language. Using state fa-

cilities and personnel, this project produced dozens of superior programs--a four-year sequence--in full color. Many schools benefited. Schools in other states soon tried to buy or rent the films, but legal obstructions prevented. Otherwise the income could have been used for producing new programs in other subjects.

B. LOCAL SUPPORT

Ten years ago the National Center for School and College TV held a conference of experts to assess the foreign language TV programs then being used in schools throughout the country. Of the ninety-four series of programs provided and sampled, only eight were intended for in-service guidance, despite the novelty of TV teaching. The remaining eighty-six were mostly FLES and generally mediocre or worse; yet they were probably superior to the many others which we vainly solicited. Throughout the country a new subject was being presented through a new medium by inexperienced TV teachers who had to devise new materials. In contrast was the privately financed series "Parlons Francais" with its budget in seven figures, highly professional production, and elaborate services and aids for the teacher. Millions of schoolchildren watched this series while it was broadcast free; when the films became available only

by purchase the producer went bankrupt.

The "lessons" are pretty obvious: most of the schools (in contrast to the parents) were reluctant, while the eager lacked the funds and specialized facilities to provide adequate programs. Ironically, the total cost of the hundreds of mediocre TV series would have sufficed to produce several of high quality. The necessary cooperation by many school systems seems, however, to be impossible under our system of local control. And so we had hundreds of local producers of television, a pathetic cottage industry.

C. THE CURRICULUM AND "SEED MONEY"

Excellent in theory, the concept of "seed money" sometimes fails in practice. Such was the case with my grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for an experimental program of elementary language learning as simulated behavioral experience (that is, dramatics in the foreign language). The seed fell on fertile ground, germination was prompt, and cultivation thorough. Unfortunately the funds dried up before the crop could mature, and there was no second crop.

The conclusion seems inescapable: the granting of "seed money" should involve a commitment of funds and personnel to stay with the project for an adequate,

specified time. Also needed is systematic observation and publicity.

III. Massive Investigations and Evaluations

Except for expert longitudinal studies such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, large-scale investigations in the foreign language field have become discredited. Inevitably, it seems, unforeseen and uncontrolled variables render suspect the best statistical computations.

A. THE NUFFIELD-BRITISH COUNCIL PROGRAM

Controversy lingers on in England over the conclusions from this ten-year (1963-1973) program in the teaching of FLES. Apparently every precaution was taken against mistakes, funds were ample, development was unhurried, and statistical analysis was expert but led to conflicting conclusions.

B. THE KEATING REPORT

Another large investigation, the so-called Keating Report of 1963, attempted to evaluate the language laboratory in the high schools of "metropolitan New York," meaning schools outside the city. Keating's (mostly negative) findings were prematurely distributed to school administrators; this pamphlet was soon seen by

the popular press, which made the most of the bad news. Since the evidence--Mr. Keating's monograph--would not be published for another two months, the incident caused resentment among foreign language teachers, and the curriculum was ill served.

C. THE "PENNSYLVANIA INVESTIGATION"

In the last decade the Pennsylvania Department of Instruction obtained generous funding from the USOE for a very ambitious investigation intended primarily to determine the relative merits of "audio-lingual" and "traditional" instruction. Several languages, dozens of school systems, hundreds of teachers and thousands of high school students were involved in this operation of several years.

The unwieldy number of groups and sub-groups is obvious: less so is the number of unknown variables involved in the interaction of directives and inspectors, teachers and principals, local and external schedules. Some "traditional" teachers were required, over their protests, to teach "audio-lingual" courses. The whole operation was so vast, sprawling and uncontrollable that the elaborate analysis of test scores was vitiated and the resulting conclusions caused lively controversy, the most notable outcome of the whole endeavor.

D. THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO "INVESTIGATION OF THE TEACHING OF A SECOND LANGUAGE"

In happy contrast, this operation (1944-1947) was highly professional, thanks to the expert direction of Ralph W. Tyler and his associate, Harold B. Dunkel. The time was propitious and the program enlightened. Moreover, the Investigation studied and evaluated programs, experimental or otherwise, that were already in progress rather than new ones. A further improvement was the placing of paid observers in some classes, to compile a detailed record of activities.

Altogether this project did a superior job. And yet, thirty years later, one must wonder if the vast expenditures of money, effort and talent have proved justified. A nice question, considering the present state of the art.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the superiority of the Chicago investigation one must say that most large-scale studies entail, by their very size, invisible or unforeseen variables. On the other hand, small but closely monitored experimental programs can yield significant results. There are statistical procedures to compensate partially for the smallness of the sample populations, and the outcomes are known to be directly relevant to

classrooms elsewhere. The conclusions can therefore be generalized, at least to the extent that the "experimental" programs are truly representative or typical.

IV. A Modest Proposal for a "Thin Area"

The NIE booklet Current Issues states (part I, p. 5) "The responses, with a few notable exceptions, failed to mention the continuing crises in urban education, the educational needs of ethnic minorities..." I note, in part II, these notable exceptions: "bilingual education and multi-cultural education"; also "curriculum for cultural pluralism" (p. 35); "thin market materials" (p. 43); "Federal involvement is most needed in newer priority areas where too few programs exist (e.g. bilingual education)" (p. 45).

Those quotations suggest the nature of my proposal. I submit that bilingual and bicultural education is an urgent need generally neglected and that the problems involved can be met and solved only by federal leadership.

Publicized years ago by Conant's Slums and Suburbs, the problems (and dangers) have received inadequate and erratic attention from local and state agencies. There is little prospect that those agencies can do better in the foreseeable future because of financial stringencies

and local disputes. Only a federal agency can take effective, disinterested action.

The social, economic and educational ills of the underprivileged minority groups are well known; likewise the consequences of those ills for the national interest and polity. I propose therefore that the NIH undertake, first, an investigation of the present centers of bilingual and bicultural education for Latin-American children and their parents (the largest minority group); second, that such investigation be followed by the gradual development of a few exemplary programs. These might be existing programs which are clearly superior or programs to be established de novo.

Basic to the entire enterprise is the concept of equality: that our language and our culture are not necessarily superior to the other fellow's, and that both are worthy of equal respect (as children believe before they acquire prejudices from their elders). Truly bilingual and bicultural learning requires that each group learn the language and the culture of the other. And since children do this best and most easily, the very earliest start should be made.

Although the beginning, investigative phase should be small and unhurried, there should be at the outset a clear commitment, from the top, of long-range policy

and, if possible, long-range funds.

Beyond these general considerations it would be presumptuous of me to suggest details and specifics. Experts in the field should undertake a preliminary survey of the existing programs and needs, and those persons should make the recommendations for action.

My investigation has identified a number of such experts:

Theodore Andersson
Univ. of Texas at Austin

Joshua Fishman
Yeshiva University

Hernan Lafontaine
New York City Schools

Ralph Rabonet
Miami, Florida Schools

H. Ned Seelye
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Maria Swanson
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